

How to do things with Searle, Derrida and Fictional Discourse.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are several segments to this text, each subheading marks the introduction to a separate element brought into the text. There is a fictional thread running through it to provide a context and a framework to help explain the theory. The fictional elements will be indented for clarity.

The aim of the first segment is to provide a basis for the rest of the text, which is an initial exploration of John R. Searle's theory on fiction taken from his essay 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse' with key explanation of illocutionary acts.

I am then going to compare the nature of an instruction piece, using examples by John Baldessari and David Shrigley, to examine Searle's theories of the illocutionary act and fictional discourse.

The next segment will contain the assertion that pretending within an utterance is or has the possibility to be a performative. I will support my argument by using several of J.L. Austin's examples within his primary isolation of the performative and Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. This will coincide with Standley Fish's criticism on Searle's essay.

After that, I will bring in Derrida's theory on language and communication from his essay 'Signature Event Context', that language has to be iterable, repeatable, and has to have the ability to exist within different contexts. I will use John Smith's piece 'The Girl Chewing Gum' to expand on this. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The territories in which the artworks explore that are in this essay are areas in which my work is and has existed, inspired by works like these. The aim for this essay is to expand the theoretical knowledge so I will be able to explore this territory in a more defined and understood way.

## AUSTIN + SEARLE

In J.L. Austin's "How to do things with words", Austin attempted to isolate a form of language in which in the act of uttering it became real or was real, by *saying* it, it was *doing* it, this was termed as the performative utterance, or a performative. Austin produces these examples in the primary isolation of the performative:

"(E. a) 'I do (sc. take the woman to be my lawful wedded wife)'-as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.

(E. b) 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*'-as uttered when smashing a bottle against the stem.

(E. c) 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother'-as occurring in a will.

(E. d)' I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.'

In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it." (Austin, 1975, p5-6)

Austin went on to evolve this into the form of an *illocutionary act*, which in the absence of Austin, Searle continued to develop the theory into a full blown classification system under the genre of 'speech acts'. Searle introduces his developed illocutionary act as:

'I believe that speaking or writing in a language insists in performing speech acts of quite specific kind called "illocutionary acts." These include making statements, asking questions, giving orders, making promises, apologizing, thanking, and so on.' (Searle, 1975, p319)

The illocutionary act is essentially not what the words a person is *saying* but what the person is *doing* by saying those words, the act *in* saying something rather than the act *of* saying something. For example: 'Shut the door.' The words

'shut', 'the' and 'door' are uttered, and in uttering those words the speaker performs the illocutionary act of an order or request.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout Searle's essay 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', he explores the nature of an assertion as an illocutionary act; due to a significant amount of fictional utterances seem to be a form of assertion. For example:

John Searle has a fluffy red elephant named Poppy, who lives in his kitchen cabinet.

According to Speech Acts theory an assertion is an illocutionary act with a specific set of rules for the assertion to be successfully completed. Failing to follow the rules would result in the failure of that particular assertion, as in the assertion would be deemed a lie, a misunderstanding or stretching the truth, &etc.<sup>3</sup>

It is however very clear that unlike the situation in which an individual performs an act of assertion with a piece of non-fiction, the author of fiction does not need to follow these rules as they are not committing themselves to a truth, and would not be expected to provide any form of evidence or to belief in the assertion that they are making.

Poppy enjoys whispering obscenities into John's ear as he gives lectures.

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<sup>2</sup> For clarification of terminology: the saying of the words has been termed by Searle as the utterance act.

<sup>3</sup> The set of rules are:

- (1) The essential rule: the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition.
- (2) The preparatory rule: the speaker must be in a position to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition.
- (3) The expressed proposition must be obviously true to both the speaker and the hearer in the context of the utterance.
- (4) The sincerity rule: the speaker commits himself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition. (Searle, 1975, p322)

It might be argued that that piece of text was a lie, or fiction is lies. However, considering that I'm not under the belief or trying to persuade that you, the reader, that it was a truth, I am not partaking in the act of trying to deceive you. The act of lying having the intention of attempting to convince someone that something, which is not true as a truth as to deceive. Fictional discourse not having to follow the rules of the illocutionary act of an assertion would not be perceived as a lie.

Over time Poppy has learnt the pattern of Johns lectures, to perceive when he was going to mention the word 'illocutionary' and slips the word cunt at exactly the right moment, "illo'cunt'ionary".

In the above text I'm asserting that there is a fluffy red elephant whispering cunt into John Searle's ear as he lectures. It would be or should be ridiculous to say I was in the belief that it was true, unless questioning my mental health, within the act of asserting the illocutionary act is suspended. However the utterance act itself is still performed, I am saying, or writing, that Poppy enjoys whispering cunt to John Searle to put him off. Yet to say that I was doing any other act outside of the normal use of language would also be false as it is understood and otherwise the reader would have to learn a completely new language and this can be read as a form of assertion. Searle's response to this predicament is that I am in fact pretending. Pretending to make an assertion of X. Pretending in the sense of performing all the actions while not actually doing the act.

"Children pretend to drive a stationary car by actually sitting in the driver's seat, moving the steering wheel, pushing the gear shift lever, and so on." (Searle, 1975, p 327)

The utterance is performed, however the illocutionary act is 'acted out' like the children pretending to drive the car. The utterance is performed exactly like a non-fictional assertion leading to the pretend illocutionary act yet the car is not

moving or actually being driven by the children. This provides the author with the ability to make an utterance that is set aside from the normal rules and protocol of an illocutionary act, and of making that utterance in a sincere and non-defective way.

For the action of pretending to be deployed by the author, the author has to intend to pretend, due to the word 'pretend' being an intentional verb. For the pretended illocutionary act to be used in fictional discourse the author has to intend for the utterance to be fiction. Which then comes down fictional discourse must be intended by the author, "the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must necessarily lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author." (Searle, 1975, p325)

Retained within the nature of an illocutionary act is the word to world/world to word relation, termed '*direction of fit*', it is the idea that an illocutionary act would either be to get the words uttered to match the world or the world to match the words uttered. For example:

John is walking around a Sainsbury's local with a shopping list that Poppy has written for him, he follows the list picking up the correct food as told by the list.

The direction of fit is world to words; the world is matching the words on the list.

Poppy is creepily following John around Sainsbury's, writing down a list of everything that John picked off the shelf and put in his basket.

This would be the opposite direction of fit; the words on the list would be matching the world. In this example both lists would end up being the same, containing the exact same items, yet John's list would be an order of what to buy

while the second list is a description of the items that John picked up and placed in his basket.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the illocutionary act, the direction of fit between language and reality is argued by Searle to be temporarily suspended within fictional discourse. He goes on to say that:

"Now what makes fiction possible, I suggest, is a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world [...] Think of the conventions of fictional discourse as a set of horizontal conventions that break the connections established by the vertical rules."  
(Searle, 1975, p320)

These horizontal conventions are not a set of rules, they just provide a theory in which the author of fiction is able to make utterances which are not tied to the set rules of illocutionary acts, the uttering words which make sense yet not directly tied to the world or reality. The act of creating pretend illocutionary acts lead to this displacement of the vertical to the horizontal.<sup>5</sup>

Act I, Scene I.

The curtain rises, a kitchen cabinet placed in the centre of the stage. A floor lamp pointing to the microphone on a stand situated just in front of the cabinet. A rustling comes from the cabinet; Poppy falls out with a cigarette held with her trunk. She composes himself and takes the microphone.

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<sup>4</sup> The direction of fit is described as a vertical axis that is faced in the direction of up or down, depending in which manner the direction of fit holds.

<sup>5</sup> "The utterance acts in fiction are indistinguishable from the utterance acts from serious discourse, and it is for that reason that there is no textual property that will identify a stretch of discourse as a work of fiction. It is the performance of the utterance act with the intention of invoking the horizontal conventions that constitutes the pretended performance of the illocutionary act." (Searle, 1975, p327)

Poppy: an illocutionary act is the act of performing an illocutionary act, consisting of making statements, asking questions, thanking, apologising and etc, to a cunt. (pretending to be John Searle)

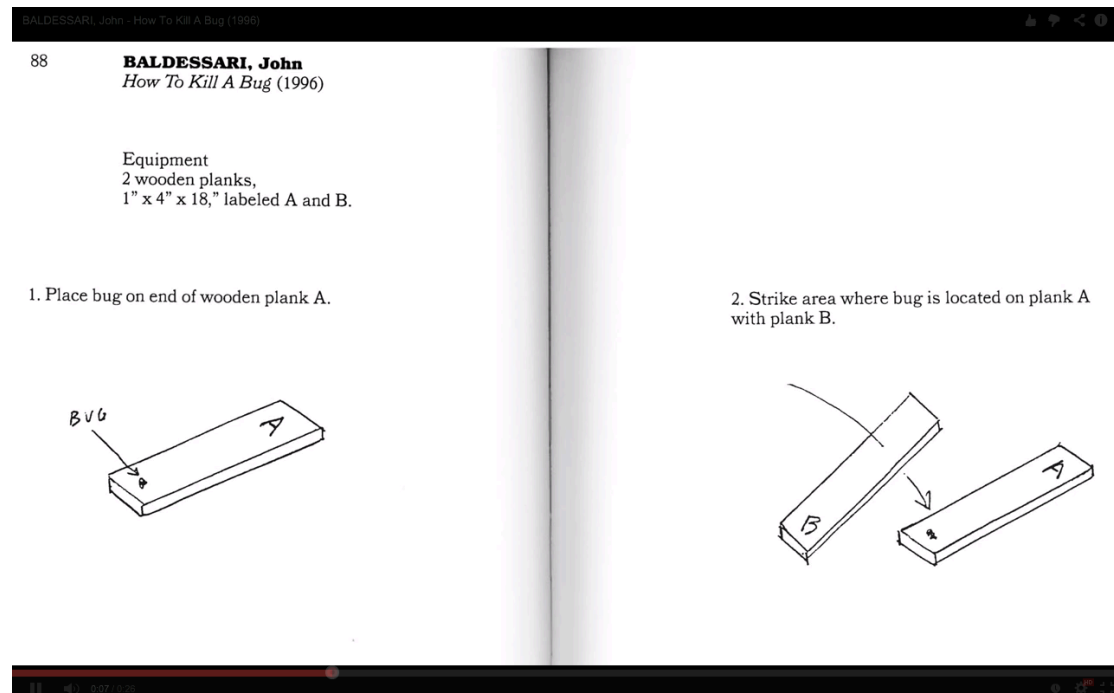
According to Searle, within dramatic texts, like the script above, the author for the most part doesn't get involved in the act of pretending, rather writes a series of serious directions or orders for which the pretence of pretending is shifted from the author to the actors.

"A fictional story is a pretended representation of a state of affairs; but a play, that is, a play performed, is not a pretended *representation* of a state of affairs but the pretended state of affairs itself, the actors pretend *to be* the characters"(Searle, 1975, p328)

The words are written to be performed by the actors, which the actors are performing under the pretence of pretending. The actors pretend to be the characters performing fictional utterances in which the illocutionary act is pretended. The author's directions would be taken to be as a literal script on how the play would actually be performed. It lacks the intention of invoking the horizontal nature of fiction, as the direction of fit would be world to words, the author intends for the world, the play, to match the words written. I would contend that Searle's argument is flawed but I'll return to this later on in part 2.



## INSTRUCTION



(Baldessari, 'how to kill a bug', 1996)



(Shrigley, 2013)

Above are two images of two separate and quite different works, which are under the branch of instructional pieces.<sup>6</sup>

The text within John Baldessari's piece 'How to Kill a Bug' is a written utterance, to be taken as just an utterance, contained within the utterance is the illocutionary act of a direction, instruction or order, depending on the force behind the utterance but these all come underneath the framework of what Searle calls 'Directives'. This is the attempt of a speaker to get the listener to do something; depending on the force behind the speakers' utterance it can be a polite request to the forced insisting of the action. In this particular case, Baldessari's utterance is more like the recipe for a cake, very little force behind it to the point in which the attempt to get the listener to follow the actions are reduced to a suggested invitation. He invites you to follow the actions but feel free to decline. "1. Place bug on end of wooden plank A." This is how you should do it if you want to. "2. Strike area where bug is located on plank A with plank B."

"DRINK YOU OWN PISS DRINK SOMEONE ELSE'S PISS"

This example is taken from a cocktail book created by Ryan Gander, which is made up of a series of artist's each creating a cocktail. Like Baldessari's piece the utterance within this is a directive, and from the way it's worded the utterance itself contains a small amount more force behind it. However I would say that this is a fictional utterance, but instead of a fictional utterance in the form of a pretend assertion this is a fictional utterance with the pretend illocutionary act of a directive. That this instruction is to be taken with a pinch of salt, as in it's not expected to be acted out. The invitation to take part in the act is still there in the form of the actual words uttered or the utterance act, the illocutionary act of directive is pretended as the action of drinking your own piss is not intended by the author to be acted out. This being not dissimilar to the phrase:

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<sup>6</sup> The use of instructions is a strategy of creating art by conceptual artists in which the object or action tends to be absent or distant from the artists own creation. The instruction is the work, leaving the action or object with an element of chance in the following of the instruction by another.

'Go jump off a cliff' says John to Poppy in anger.

In which the John is not intending for the utterance to be taken as a literal direction.

There is a lack of clarity with Shrigley's piece, in that I can't say for sure if the nature of the instruction was to be a real directive or a fictional one, as it is plausible that it could be acted out and it was the intention of the author for it to be so. I can't make the assumption that a failed directive becomes a fictional one as for example:

Poppy ignores John, 'Please pass the salt' she says.

This would not be thought of as fiction if John did not to pass the salt, rather that the utterance did not convince the John to pass the salt or that John didn't hear Poppy or that it would be illogical for her to pass the salt as she was in a different room and the salt was next to John uttering the request, &ect. I could argue that Shrigley's utterance was fiction up until the point in which it was acted out but this ignores the intentions of the author, in which Searle states that the nature of pretending requires the intention to do so, the employing of conventions which suspends the vertical direction of fit, the relationship between word and world, to employ a horizontal one. What if Poppy was to actually jump off a cliff once John had told her to do precisely that, it would not change the nature of the utterance, that being a pretended direction, even though I'm sure that John would feel bad, he would not be accountable for it being a real order. The intention that it would be a pretended illocutionary act would not be changed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This same logic can then be applied to John Baldessari's example, that even though the directive is perceived as plausible and it would not be out of the question for someone to follow the directions, the intention behind the utterance could be that it was fictional and for anyone to act it out would not change the pretended illocutionary act in the original utterance. I would then say we don't know the intentions of the author in both of these cases.

This relates back to my discomfort with Searle's theory on dramatic texts, within the example I used earlier he states "[...] but a play, that is, a play as performed [...]" (Searle, 1975, p328) alongside a piece of dramatic text which in its current state is not being performed by actors on a stage by sitting as a series of utterances on the page included within his essay. As the reader, reading this particular essay would be unlikely to intend to perform the dramatic text, thus not reading them as instructions. It would also be unlikely that the dramatic text is being acted out at the exact moment in front of the reader reading the essay, the actors performing the illocutionary acts in the state of pretend. I would say that the dramatic text, in this instance would most likely be read as a piece of fiction.

He follows later on with this statement: " [...] it seems to me the illocutionary force of the text of a play is like the illocutionary force of a recipe for baking a cake. It is a set of instructions for how to do something, namely, how to perform the play." (Searle, 1975, p329) I believe this provides the opportunity to challenge this with the above arguments.

How do we know the intentions of the author behind the text, is it to be acted out or read as fiction?<sup>8</sup>

1. If it was intended to be instructions for a play, then the illocutionary act is in place, acted out, and deemed non-fiction, and the pretending is within the performance by the actors.
2. If it was intended to be fiction but was acted out then it doesn't change the illocutionary act being pretended in the utterance and then the text is deemed fiction.

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<sup>8</sup> It might be argued that the framework in which the author puts the utterance in dictates how it is to be read. It is written in the form of dramatic text shows the intention of the author, which I might agree with but this can be brought into question, namely the example of Shrigley's work. This can also be shown with satirical forms of writing such as a fictional news article.

Without the clear indication in where the pretence for fiction comes into action or is required, the utterance is both fiction and non-fiction; the illocutionary act is both acted out and pretended. It could fall down to the intentions of the viewer, how the viewer decides to read it, which is a very uninteresting conclusion. If the reader is reading the dramatic text to perform it on a stage, then it could be thought of as a series of instructions, but if the reader is not intending to do this, rather sit and enjoy the utterance as on the page, as not to intend to perform it, then it can be thought of as fiction. It might be like the case of Schrodinger's cat, that it can be thought of as both dead and alive, fiction or non fiction, until the box is opened, until its read by the reader with their own intentions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This then calls in to question Searle's theory on author intentions, and since it was stated that pretending was only capable of working if it was intended, it is then questionable if the pretended illocutionary acts is a valid argument, as the author has to be intending to pretend to perform an illocutionary act for it to be fictional.

## FISH

Stanley Fish, a literary critic and theorist, saw some fundamental flaws within Searle's argument involving the understanding of fictional discourse.

"Searle himself says as much when at the end of the article he feels "compelled" to make a "final distinction: that between a work of fiction and fictional discourse. A work of fiction need not consist entirely of, and in general will not consist entirely of, fictional discourse." At this point the hope of isolating fiction is abounded: "real world" or serious discourse can be found in novels, and fictional discourse is often engaged in by persons operating in the "real world," by philosophers who say, "Let us suppose that a man hammers a nail," and by sales managers who say, "Men, let's assume you run into someone who has never seen an encyclopaedia...." in short, fictional discourse and work of fiction are not co-extensive categories because fictional discourse is a rigorous notion in a way that work of fiction is not." (FISH, 1976, p1016-1017)

If it is apparently possible for an utterance to be both part fictional and part serious, which seems entirely possible, at which point does the pretence for fiction come into play? The necessity for the isolation for pretence just for fiction is questionable. If it is required for utterance to be seen as fiction, yet not required for the serious segments, the speaker surely would be required to indicate to each and every point the utterance the discourse switches across to keep the pretence in play for when it is only fictional, it is not plausible for that the authors intentions are able to convey this.<sup>10</sup>

I'm going to pick up on the notion of someone in the 'real world' taking part in fictional discourse, such as "let us suppose that..." or "let us imagine that..." or "lets pretend that...", and relate this act to Searle's fictional discourse and then

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<sup>10</sup> Fish, and later Derrida, states that a pretence is in a sense required for all language to work.

Austin's performative utterance in order to test the elasticity of Searle's theory against a definite fiction outside of his pre-existing argument.

What then happens when the words "let us suppose that a man hammers a nail" are uttered in the context of 'real world' discourse?

1. With Searle's theory the fictional utterance is said with the intention of employing the horizontal direction of fit by the pretended illocutionary act of an assertion.
2. or I would say at the very least the utterance "let us suppose" is producing the pretence of fictional discourse which the fiction being "a man hammers a nail".
3. or "let us suppose" after this the utterer, and maybe the listener, is taking part in the act of supposing.
4. "suppose, verb - used to introduce a hypothesis and imagine its development: *suppose he had been murdered- what then?*" (Dictionary: suppose) - hypothesis being an act of fictional discourse.

Under the basic premise of Austin's performative utterance, this being; the doing of an action in performing an utterance. The act of hypothesising something, being fictional discourse in the context of 'reality' or 'real world' discourse, namely performing utterances such as 'Let us suppose that...', 'Let us imagine that...', 'Let us pretend that...' <sup>11</sup>, this is a performative utterance, due to the accompanying action of:

1. the pretended illocutionary act.
2. or producing the pretence of fictional discourse, or a fiction.
3. or taking part in the act of 'supposing', 'imagining', or 'pretending', &ect.
4. or introducing the hypothesis (fictional discourse) and imagining it's development.

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<sup>11</sup> Even with the prefix of 'let us', it is not required for the listener to also take part in, or to agree to, the action for the performative to be active or not infelicitous, as the utterance is doing the action and thus the speaker, or utterer, is complicit in the action.

In the case of a hypothesis, it can be put back into the taxonomy of the illocutionary act under the term of 'Representatives'. The act of an assertion also fits in the same class as the hypothesis: the representatives. Within the classification of this class of illocutionary act, Searle goes on to say:

"The direction of fit is words to the world; the psychological state expressed is Belief (that p). It is important to emphasise that words such as 'belief' and 'commitment' are here intended to mark dimensions; they are so to speak determinable rather than determinate. Thus, there is a difference between *suggesting* that p or *putting if forward as a hypothesis* that p on one hand and *insisting* that p or *solemnly swearing* that p on the other. The degree of belief and commitment may approach or even reach zero, but it is clear or will become clear, that *hypothesising that p* and *flatly stating that p* are in the same line of business in a way that neither is like requesting." (Searle, 1976, p10)

A hypothesis being an utterance with very little evidence or no evidence of the truth behind it, or it not containing within it an assumption that it might be true, puts it in the realm of fictional discourse. Yet, within this classification it is considered an illocutionary act rather than a pretended illocutionary act due to the ability for the belief and commitment behind an 'representative' to be zero. This ability given to the representative by Searle himself completely undermines a main distinction between fictional and non-fictional discourse, being that an author of fiction is not held to any form of truth or assumed to be truth within their utterances. As Fish states earlier, Searle fails to isolate what he means by fictional discourse.

Fish picks up on Searle's distinction between '*serious*' and '*fictional*' assertions, a serious assertion being a 'normal' utterance that is held in relation to the world, where the direction of fit has not been broken by the horizontal conventions of fiction, in which the assertion is 'held accountable' to a truth. Fish argues that the test for either one only works within the *internal canons of criticism* for each and



every discourse, and this generates a boundary that has the possibility to be moved with each outcome. He later underlines the internal element:

"I'm only insisting that these canons are indeed internal, and that what counts as a mistake is a function of the universe of discourse within which one speaks, and does not at all touch on the question of what is ultimately-that is, outside of and independent of, any universe of discourse-real. In short, the rules and conventions under which speakers and hearers 'normally' operate don't demand that language be faithful to the facts; rather, they specify the shape of that fidelity (what Gale calls the 'real workaday world'), creating it, rather than enforcing it." (FISH, 1976, p1018)

With boundary between fictional discourse and serious discourse was in a sense broken down with Searle's last clarification, with the abandoning of a clear isolation of fiction. The apparent stable nature of a serious utterance seems dubious, what constitutes an utterance to be considered, or understood, to be factual, or connected with the world or reality, when often its not brought into question within the apparent context of the world. At the point of an assertion being uttered, the truth of it seems evident or not, but either way lets say that the assertion is not followed with apparent evidence of that fact, it would still be indefinable within its status of fiction vs fact. Fish argues that the *internal cannons of criticism* of Searles reasoning has the possibility of deciding "between two systems of discourse" that being of two stories, yet is unable to pinpoint within the scale of reality, and proceeds to shift the question from fact vs fiction, serious vs non-serious, to the real vs the not-so-real:

"Of course the conventions of "serious" discourse include a *claim* to be in touch with the real (that is what being the standard story means), and therefore it comes equipped with evidentiary procedures (routines for checking things out) to which members of its class must be ready to submit. But these procedures (which fictional discourse lacks, making it different, not less 'true') inhere in the genre and therefore they cannot be brought forward to prove its fidelity to some

supraconventional reality. [...] this only means that of the reality consisted by a variety of discourse conventions it is the most popular. That is why we give it the names we do - 'real workaday world,' 'normal circumstances,' 'ordinary usage,' &etc." (FISH, 1976, p1019)

Searle's example of serious discourse consisted of a newspaper report, one in which follows a tradition of providing *considerable* proof for the assertions made when under question. Fish brings in another example, a discourse contained within history, where fellow historians, or others, hold each other accountable. Each of these, and other traditions which are considered to be factual, hold a convention of debate and accountability. Neither of these genres helps the bridge to the everyday discourse or 'ordinary' discourse outside of a specialised field, as there can't be considered a *normal* reality or discourse. The direction of fit contained within speech acts, the relationship between world and word, holds a clean example of the terminology of *the normal*, the world holding and consisting reality but an unquestioning of it. The word and world both to be considered absolute things, and the apparent horizontal conventions fiction holds suggests something other than something within the world. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "A speaker tells a story which he claims to be factual. It begins "A man and a boy were standing by a fountain," and it continues: "The man had a drink." shall we say that the hearer knows which or what particular is being referred to be the subject expression in the second sentence? We might say so. For, of a certain range of two particulars, the words "the man" serve to distinguish the one referred to, by means of a description which applies only to him.... I shall call it ... a story-relative, or, for short, a relative identification. For it is identification only relative to a range of particulars (a range of two members) which is itself identified only as the range of particulars being talked about by the speaker.... The identification is within a certain story told by a certain speaker. It is identification within his story; but not identification within history." (FISH, 1976, p1018-1019)

The above taken from P.I. Strawson, Fish uses this as a reference to make the assertion that all stories have identification, this being a specification of things within the discourse or 'facts', as within the context of the story the identification that the man who takes the drink, rather than the boy takes the drink.

Fish introduces that a great part of his argument is taken from Wittgenstein's notion of a *language game* and continues with:

"in which words are responsible not to what is real, but to what has been laid down as real (as pickoutable) by a set of constitutive rules; the players of the game are able to agree that they mean the same things by their words not because they see the same things, in some absolute phenomenal sense, but because they are predisposed by the fact of being in the game (of being parties to the standard story) to 'see them,' to pick them out." (FISH, 1976, p1021)

This take on the use of and language itself insinuates that the author is in a constant state of referral, in that in the act of picking something out and 'seeing them' is like the act of referring to something that is previously understood or laid down as real. Language is constantly picking things out (or referring) from a supposed reality, to be able to be used within the game, but not responsible to what is real. In which language cannot be truly untied from the supposed reality but cannot be in direct connection to 'the reality'. In this case, any of Searle's propositions of a direct link between words and world, and the breaking of it with the use of fiction, seems over simplified and fundamentally flawed.

## DERRIDA

Derrida takes the notion of writing, as an act of communication, communication taken as a vehicle to transport meaning through signs or units through the different methods e.g. oral, written &etc. Taken from Condillac's idea of writing, Derrida makes the point that the reason people write is:

"(1) because they have to communicate; (2) because what they have to communicate is their 'thought,' their 'ideas,' their representations. Thought, as representation, precedes and governs communication, which transports the 'idea,' the signified content; (3) because men are *already* in a state that allows them to communicate their thought to themselves and to each other when, in a continuous manner, they invent the particular means of communication, writing." (Derrida, 1988, p4)

"Men in a state of communicating their thoughts by means of sounds, felt the necessity of imagining new signs capable of perpetuating those thoughts and of making them *known* to persons who are *absent*." (Derrida, 1988, p4)

The key word within this idea is the word absent, writing induces a method of communicating content to an individual which is not present at the moment of authorship, which is still able to transport this content in the absence of the author's presence after the moment of inscription. The written signs act as a method of expressing, representing or recalling the content, idea, thought or meaning behind the signs.

"The sign comes into being at the same time as imagination and memory, the moment is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception." (Derrida, 1988, p6)

This would necessitate a certain absence of the context for which the object or content exists, as it is outside of present perception, it, I would say, only lies

within the context of the content and the signs present, or rather in the imagination and memory of the reader contemplating what is, or within, the present signs<sup>13</sup>. This is then both left undefined for factual and fictional discourse, as there is any lack of the content within present perception, or in other words when something is outside of present perception. Without an inherent context of the writing it is indefinable to what the reality value is of the content is.

"in order for my 'written communication' to retain its function, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable-iterable- in absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectively of receivers such iterability structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved. A writing that is not structurally readable- iterable- beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing." (Derrida, 1988, p7)

The iterability that Derrida introduces is the necessity for signs within language to be repeatable, that the units of language can be said and written more than once, and if its only ever made once, it would be possible for it to be copied or cited as the fact it is was originally uttered or written. This iterability that lets the units be repeated, gives the possibility for a difference between the two units, within the act of repeating or citing something, even if exactly the same, introduces a difference as there is now two of them, that would hold the possibility for them exist in separate contexts. This means that the exact same utterance can be completed in various contexts, each one having the possibility of holding a different truth vs fiction value.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Derrida argues that this transfer of the sign does not act as a delay within instantaneous communication, that being when the speaker and recipient are in the same context or space.

<sup>14</sup> "A written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectively of presences organising the moments of inscription. This breaking force is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written

John left a note on the kitchen table, it read: Can you please not turn up to my next lecture, there is going to be very important people attending and I cant accidentally say cunt.

As previously touched upon, the written symbol would have to continue to work as communication without the existence of a particular receiver for that content, since the necessity for language to be repeatable, the meaning might be misconstrued but the sign itself would be still acting independently from a particular viewer. From the moment of writing, the presence of the author within the act of the inscription, the sign would be considered absent from the author, the mark having been made to be able to act independently, the implied absence of the author within the act of writing the sign or symbol.

"For a writing to be writing it must continue to 'act' and be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written 'in his name.' One could repeat at this point the analysis outlined above this time with regard to the addressee." (Derrida, 1988, p8)<sup>15</sup>

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text. In the case of a so-called 'real' context, what I have just asserted is all too evident. This allegedly real context includes a certain 'present' of the inscription, the presence of the writer to what he has written, the entire environment and the horizon of his experience, and above all the intention, the wanting-to-say-what-he-means, which animates his inscription at a given moment. But the sign possess the characteristics of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned it to its essential drift." (Derrida, 1988, p9)

<sup>15</sup> I would then argue that for the writing to continue to act independently from a particular viewer, it would then be possible for the writing to be independent from any viewer, it is untied from any particular context, yet if the writing still

In the absence of the writer, which generates the loss of intention, language has to continue to 'act' outside of a specific and concrete context, or connection to the world. Each reference contained in the language, i.e. *poppy is red*, can't rely to be within the present perception of the reader, or the writer can't rely on the reader to be in the same context. Language then does not hold an inherent inbuilt truth-value or a solid connection with reality. The truth-value can only be defined by the reader from the context in which they meet the language in relation to their own memory and imagination, which is provoked by the reading of the signs. At which point they are able to decide to what point the language is on the fictional-real scale, if they were to choose to do so. This is then only defined for that one particular reader, not for the language itself to gain a label or defining factor with an inherent inbuilt concrete truth-value. It's not plausible to have totalitarian definite truth-value attached to a word.

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exists, in a very crude way, it would still be continuing to 'do what it does' even if no one is looking at it. The signs will still be present and the signs itself would then still be acting as those signs, the signs still being part of language. Yet, without the writer or reader present to provide a meaning or context to the signs, would they continue to exist as language?

## THE GIRL CHEWING GUM



(Smith, The Girl Chewing Gum, 1976, 0:35min)

In John Smith's 'The Girl Chewing Gum' (1976) the viewer is actively deceived through the relationship between image and the utterances. The utterances taking the form of an apparent directive, backed up with the image providing an evidence of this act; the directive is followed with the action played out.

"right, now I want the old man with white hair and glasses to cross the road. Come on, quickly. Now look this way. Now walk off to the left. Okay, fine." (Smith, 1976, 0:33 min)

True enough, an old man with white hair and glasses crosses the road, half way across proceeds to move quicker, then looks towards the camera and walks off to the left. At this point, it is plausible to the viewer that the utterances are indeed directives, that Smith is commanding and part controlling the series of events that occurs within the film; the utterances are appearing to exist before the event happens. As the viewer is not within the same context as the film being made,



they have to rely on the evidence provided; at this point the utterances exist and are perceived as directives.

This assumption continues to exist until a directive was given for two pigeons to fly across the screen, this act still happens but the plausibility that Smith is in control of the pigeons is questionable, but could still happen, this hint that the utterance might not be a directive is then semi-hidden with a quick series of other plausible directives that are acted out.

There is then a fluctuation between the utterance and the evidence shown, as utterances start to contain information that isn't readily available, falling into fictional utterances.

"The dentist continues on his way to the bank, and the two naughty boys [...]"  
(Smith, 1976, 6:51 min)

Descriptions are blended in with the assumed directives, which are blended in with apparent fictional directives. The descriptions tend not to be backed up with evidence, which can be thought of as fictional or factual depending on the plausibility. This mess of utterances with the variation of evidence leads to a change in the viewer's perspective, everything is then assumed as fictional utterances. The directives before this moment become fictional directives as in descriptions of the action that appear to happen before the action itself.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the film, there is no definite truth in each utterance, just the evidence provided<sup>17</sup> and plausibility of the truth within the imagination and

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<sup>16</sup> "I'm shouting into a microphone on the edge of a field near letchmoor heath, about 15 miles from the building you're looking at. I am surrounded by electricity pylons and trees. The sky is beginning to cloud over. In the distance I can see a middle aged man in a brown duffle coat. He's got a dog with him, which looks like a Labrador, and I think he's got a helicopter in his pocket. In a tree about 20 yards away, I can see a large blackbird with a wingspan of about 9feet."  
(Smith, 1976, 8:05 min)

<sup>17</sup> which can be considered not evidence, as it is fabricated by the artist.

memory of the viewer. This is a clear example to the fragility of truth vs fiction, as we start out convinced that the utterances are directions given by Smith which has to be re-evaluated as we question the evidence provided, coinciding with Smith moving into a fictional realm. The exact same utterances can be considered a form of truth or fiction, switching in retrospect. The necessity of the iterability of these utterances means that they have to be able to exist as both fiction and fact as the context changes.

The distance between the contexts in which the film is created in to the viewers provides the opportunity for Smith to deceive us in a convincing way, the distance between the utterances, the image and the viewer. The viewer is left not truly knowing which elements are fictional or real, or if the whole thing is fictional. The different perspectives on how the utterances act, as up to the viewer, changes how the film is understood.

## DERRIDA VS SEARLE

The notion of iterability undermines Searle's idea of the direction of fit, with each separate type of illocutionary act Searle states that there is a specific one-way relation between the world and word, i.e. an assertion is a world to word. This idea prompts that there is always a direct concrete link between the word and the world, this now sounds very dubious once we take into account that same utterance would have to continue to act over many different and changing contexts.

This then sets off a domino effect to Searle's surrounding ideas on fiction, the *pretending* to assert a thing to *break the virtual direction of fit to introduction horizontal conventions*, the act of pretending was introduced as a way of navigating around his imposed theory of the direction of fit. If language can have or does have a continually changing relationship to the world, is it not plausible for someone to actually assert something and for it to be regarded as fiction, knowing that the reader might read it as fiction or reality won't necessarily change the signs on the page.

With the lack of the need to pretend, there is a lack of the need to intend to pretend, not that the speaker might intend to utter. The absence from the author-speaker and the presence of their context may abstract the intentions. This then breaks open the barrel of lies, in the sense it undermines Searle's separation from fiction and lies, for the reader-listener may not know that it was the author's intention to deceive them.

## CONCLUSION

Searle's philosophy of illocutionary acts does not theorise language after the moment of creation, as it is tied down to the moment in which the utterance is produced and the actions in and of producing it. Thus, it cannot really be used in the expanded sense to explain a general theory of language outside of the moment of creation. It does not accommodate for how language can be viewed and interpreted while being received, which I would say is the point in which the validity of truth within an utterance is determined, within the memory and imagination of the receiver related to the utterance.

Language has a necessity for it to be iterable, for it to be able to be used in a vast and ultimately unlimited range of contexts. Each context can change the interpretation of a single utterance, in that nothing can be firmly a truth or false. A unit of language can be true in one context and false, or fiction, in another. Which leads onto the idea that there is no inbuilt truth attached to language, for the exact same utterance can be false in another context. The reader-receiver of language decides the truth-value to an utterance just as much as the author, but in this act neither the author nor receiver can permanently attach a concrete truth-value to an utterance, no matter how much they believe it to be as this can be.

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